SPRING 2007

MILK RIVER WATERSHED NEWS

FWS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

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It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations.

The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts.

It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

For more information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, visit our home page at:

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US Fish and Wildlife Service Seeks Public Comment

News Release

US Fish and Wildlife Service
Mountain-Prairie Region
134 Union Boulevard
Lakewood, Colorado 80228
Tuesday, May 8, 2007

Contacts:
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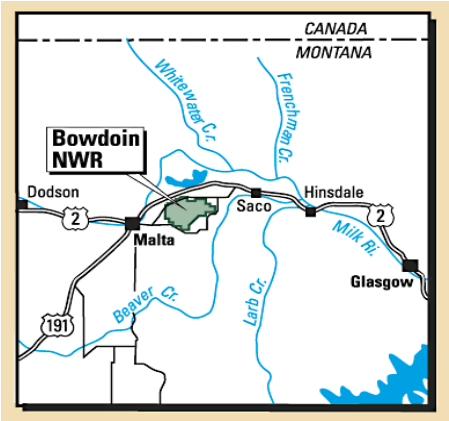


US Fish and Wildlife Service

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Seeks Public Comment on the Future of the Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge Complex

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge Complex is hosting a public meeting on May 22 at the Great Northern Hotel in Malta, Montana, from 7-9 p.m. The public is invited to comment on the upcoming 15-year Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). This plan will affect everything the Complex manages, from wildlife and habitat, to public use activities.

Attendees will learn about the planning process and have an opportunity to provide their comments about what they enjoy about the Complex and what changes they would like to see take place over the next 15 years.

People unable to attend the meeting may send written comments by email to bowdoin@fws.gov or by mail to: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Attn: Laura King, 9754 143 ½ Ave. SE, Cayuga, ND 58013.
All written comments must be received or postmarked by June 30, 2007 to be considered by the planning team. It is estimated that a draft plan will be available for public review by August 2008.

For more information, please contact the refuge at 406-654-2863.

INSIDE

Milk River Project Joint Board of Control Hires Manager

Jennifer Brandon

Hello, my name is Jennifer Brandon. I have recently been hired as the manager of the Milk River Irrigation Project Joint Board of Control. I was raised in Sunburst (located on the Sweetgrass/Coutts, Alberta Border) and currently reside in Havre. After completing high school, I headed off to college. I graduated from Great Falls College of Technology in Microcomputers and Web Design, and then transferred to Montana State University – Northern to continue my education. In the spring of 2006, I graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Information Systems Engineering Technology, with a minor in Computer Science. Although I can honestly say that I didn't see the world of water as a career choice during college, I am excited about this new opportunity. I look forward to the challenges this newly created position presents, and feel confident that my background and education have prepared me for this new chapter in my life.

I do hope to meet and have a chance to hear ideas from everyone involved with the Milk River Project in the weeks to come. Please feel free to contact me – brandonj@mtintouch.net with your comments and/or suggestions. I look forward to working with you!

Development of Milk River Watershed Group

Lorna Philp, NRCS Phillips County

Interested individuals along the Milk River from Valley County to Hill County have met for initial scoping meetings to consider establishing a Milk River Watershed Group. Warren Kellogg, NRCS Watershed Specialist, discussed the benefits of forming a Watershed Group. The three basic approaches to a Watershed Group are 1) Policy (such as water rights adjudication), 2) Projects (a multi-land user effort) and 3) Education. Mr. Kellogg has stressed that watershed groups are usually sponsored or started by a local Conservation District with grass roots membership concerned with natural resource conservation. There are many benefits and challenges involved with developing a new watershed group. Benefits include, but not limited, to local control and leadership, grant funding opportunities, address mandated issues, education, and a multi-interest natural resource group may help influence political issues. Challenges may include time commitments by members, workload, travel logistics, differing opinions, and not duplicating efforts being addressed by other groups.

Individuals who have attended the scoping meetings agree that there are many concerns and needs within the Milk River Basin. A majority of the attendees agree that a watershed group is needed and would be useful to address resource concerns. Potential projects and ideas that have been discussed include: Noxious weed control, portable vehicle wash stations, water quality, water quantity, salinity, water rights, economic development, clean-up along river, river meander and bank erosion, beaver effects, and canal lining.

At this point, the watershed group is in the planning stage which includes determining the extent of the watershed size, organizational structure, and operating guidelines. A subcommittee will meet throughout the summer to develop draft documents to present to the entire watershed group in September. Local participation is very important to the development and success of this group. If you are interested or would like more information on the Milk River Watershed group, please contact your local Conservation District in Hill, Valley, Blaine, or Phillips Counties.

Nelson Feeder Canal Hydromet Station

The Nelson Feeder Canal Hydromet Station is a self-contained data collection platform complete with solar panel, battery, and satellite transmission capability. The footbridge seen in the background is used to take manual discharge measurements. The measurements are used to refine the stage-discharge rating curve.

The Nelson Feeder Canal Hydromet Station measures inflows into Nelson Reservoir. Water passing this point is measured using a gas purge system that releases a constant flow of compressed air through a high pressure orifice line that runs from the instrument to a fixed position in the water. A microprocessor controller determines the amount of pressure needed in the compressor tank to produce a constant bubble rate under the current head pressure. The pressure is then converted into a gauge reading by the instrument.

An instrument measurement is made every 15 minutes and stored on a data collection platform, or DCP mounted in the instrument panel along side the measuring instrument. Every four hours the DCP transmits the raw data via satellite to Boise, Idaho. The satellite downlink in Boise, Idaho collects and relays the raw data to Reclamation, Great Plains Regional Office in Billings, Montana where it is decoded, processed, formatted, archived and posted on the internet. The entire process is automated. Pretty cool!

Efforts to Rehabilitate the St. Mary Diversion and Conveyance Works Advance in Senate

Paul Azevedo, Project Coordinator, MT DNRC

Government agencies seem to take great pleasure in the use of acronyms and have added a new one, WRDA (Water Resources Development Act) to the lexicon of the St. Mary Rehabilitation Project. Thanks to the efforts of Senator Max Baucus, language giving federal authorization for rehabilitation of the St. Mary Diversion and Conveyance Works was included in the 2007 WRDA bill. The bill (S.1248), which authorizes the expenditure of up to $140 million on the rehabilitation effort, was recently passed by the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. With the Committee's action, efforts to rehabilitate the St. Mary system have taken a significant step forward in the US Senate.

St Mary's new diversion dam and bridge

From the Department of Natural Resources perspective, we applaud Senator Baucus for thinking outside the box and taking the bold step of using WRDA as a vehicle to secure federal authorization for the project. In order to include the authorization in this year's WRDA bill, Senator Baucus had to convince Committee Chair Barbara Boxer to allow other Senators on the Committee to attach an additional $140 million for projects within their own states.

The importance of Senator Baucus' efforts can not be understated. Before any federal resources can be appropriated to the project, Congress must first authorize the expenditure of federal funds and provide guidance on their use. The lack of Congressional authorization has been the major impediment to progress over the last three years. WRDA's standard cost-share of 75% federal 25% non-federal is also a very attractive feature.

In addition to providing a whole new range of opportunities, Senator Baucus' decision to move forward with WRDA has also generated some concerns. Representatives from the Blackfeet Tribe and Ft. Belknap Indian Community are concerned that language contained in the bill will allow the federal government to sidestep the Tribe's desire to reach a settlement on their prospective water right compacts prior to the start of construction on the rehabilitation project. Representatives from both Tribes have been working with Senator Baucus to address Tribal concerns.

Although receiving Congressional authorization is a major milestone for the project, the work is just beginning. WRDA only *authorizes* the expenditure of up to $140 million of federal funds; the bill does not provide any money. Funding to complete the remaining engineering and environmental studies and to construct the preferred alternative will be sought through the federal appropriations process. This promises to be a protracted annual exercise that will more than likely span the life of the rehabilitation effort. It is like getting permission from one group of people to rebuild a piece of farm equipment and then going to another group for the money every single time you need to buy a part.

Including authorization to rehabilitate the St. Mary Diversion & Conveyance Works in WRDA also introduces a new federal agency to the project, the US Army Corps of Engineers. Under its civil works program, the Corps plans, constructs, and operates water resources facilities primarily for flood damage reduction, navigation, and environmental purposes. Congress authorizes Corps planning and construction activities through WRDA.

The 2007 WRDA bill is tentatively scheduled for a hearing before the full Senate during the week of May 14. Committee Chair Barbara Boxer has indicated that she would like the Senate to finish with WRDA by the end of May or within the first few weeks of June. From there, the bill will go to a conference committee to be reconciled with the version that emerged from the House on April 19th. As a member of the conference committee, Senator Baucus will work to ensure that the bill retains provisions addressing the needs of the St. Mary Rehabilitation Project. The Conference committee is tentatively scheduled to meet in July.

Milk River Water Supply

Jeremy Giovando, Bureau of Reclamation
April 30, 2007

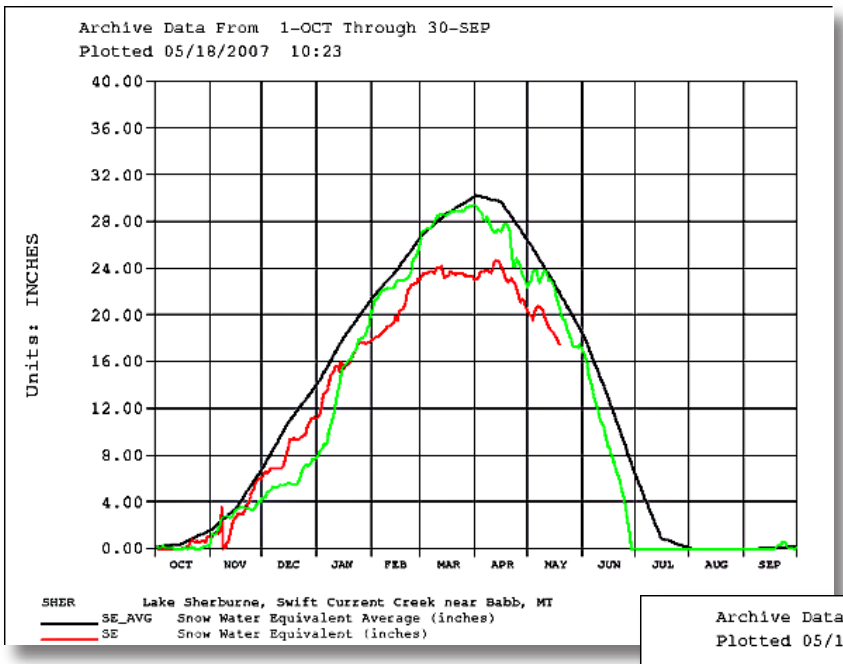
Overall water supply conditions in the Milk River basin look good this season. The total storage for the Milk River Project is currently above average for this time of year. Storage for Lake Sherburne, Fresno and Nelson Reservoirs are 97, 133 and 123 percent of average, respectively. Releases from Lake Sherburne were initiated on March 5, and subsequently diversions were initiated on March 8 to the St. Mary Canal. Total water diverted to the Milk River through the end of April was approximately 33,000 acre-feet, which is 171 percent of average. Fresno Reservoir releases were increased on March 21 to control the rise of the reservoir, as well as transfer water to Nelson Reservoir. Water diversions from the Milk River to Nelson Reservoir were initiated on March 12 to capture tributary runoff below Fresno Dam.

January and February inflows to Lake Sherburne were below average; however in March, the abnormally warm conditions resulted in low elevation snowmelt. Consequently, March and April inflows improved significantly. Inflows from January through April for Fresno Reservoir were approximately 128 percent of average, principally due to the above average volume of water diverted through the St. Mary canal.

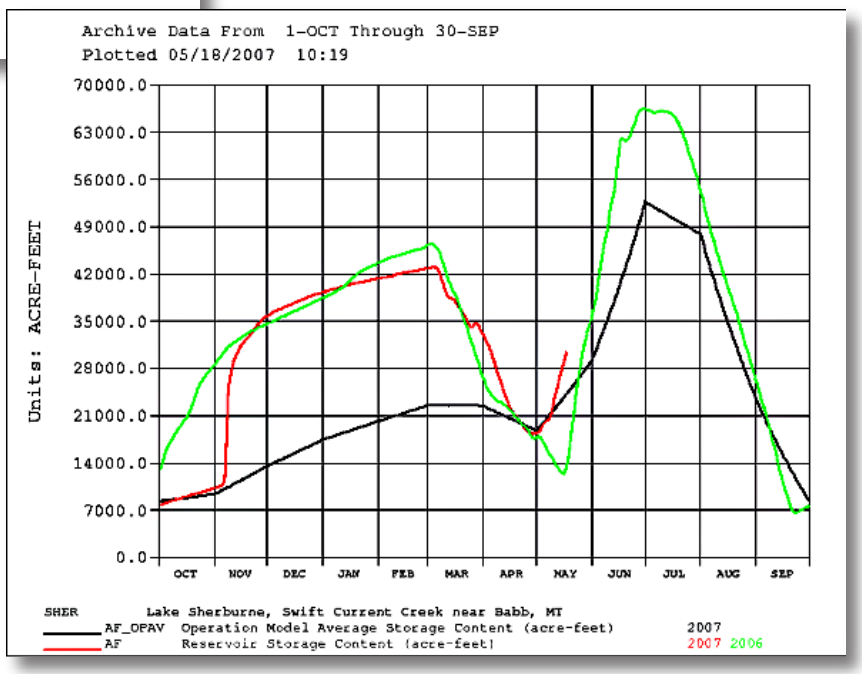
Storage as of May 17, 2007			
Reservoir	**Storage (acre-feet)**	**% Normal**	**% Full**
Lake Sherburne	30,500	125	46
Fresno	93,000	137	100
Nelson (active)	60,000	129	98

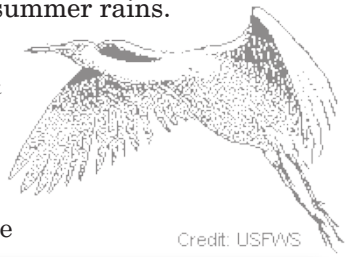
The snowpack entering May is below normal in several basins across Montana. The snowpack in the headwaters and mainstem of the Missouri River are 72 and 70 percent of average, respectively. Areas further north along the Rocky Mountain Front reflect similar snowpack conditions. The composite snowpack for the St. Mary and Milk River basins are approximately 75 percent of average; however the total precipitation is still above average for the water year. At this time, the snowmelt runoff and summer flows for the St. Mary basin are anticipated to be below average. The snowmelt runoff in the Milk River basin is generally over, therefore any additional runoff will depend on spring and summer rains.

Snowpack Above Lake Sherburne



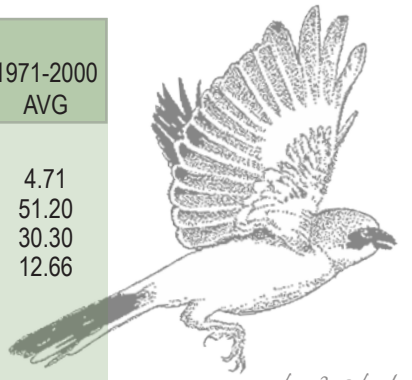
Lake Sherburne Storage





Precipitation

BASIN / PRECIPITATION STATION	MARCH THIS YEAR	MARCH LAST YEAR	MARCH 1971-2000 AVG	YR TO DATE THIS YEAR	YR TO DATE LAST YEAR	YR TO DATE 1971-2000 AVG
ST. MARY MOUNTAIN & VALLEY PCP						
BABB 6NE	.70	.45	.88	4.87	4.29	4.71
FLATTOP MTN	8.30	4.00	7.20	58.80	55.10	51.20
MANY GLACIER	7.60	1.80	4.00	35.50	29.10	30.30
SAINT MARY	1.62	1.50	1.80	---	10.14	12.66
Total -- 3 stations	137.0%	266.0%		115.0%	112.0%	
(prec, in = 16.60)		(6.25)		(99.17)	(88.49)	
MILK MOUNTAIN & VALLEY PCP						
BEAR PAW SKI AREA	1.10	.80	1.10	7.40	7.00	5.40
BOXELDER CREEK	1.90	.80	1.50	9.20	8.10	7.00
CHINOOK	.92	.68	.56	3.80	4.51	3.06
DEL BONITA	.04	---	.73	---	---	2.94
DODSON	.57	.54	.57	3.29	3.31	2.91
FORT ASSINNIBOINE	.76	.47	.66	3.45	3.48	3.23
GILFORD	.09	.38	.48	2.49	2.81	2.31
GLASGOW WSO	.09	.22	.47	2.48	3.04	2.55
HAVRE WSO	.81	.22	.70	3.39	3.00	3.11
HARLEM	.71	.49	.38	2.92	3.50	2.45
HINGHAM 11 N	.00	.39	.38	2.36	2.45	1.85
KREMLIN	.56	31	.59	3.41	2.70	2.75
MALTA 7E	.34	.39	.59	2.51	3.38	2.95
OPHEIM 10 N	.47	.23	.38	1.87	2.18	2.13
OPHEIM 12 SSE	.36	.18	.39	1.82	1.86	2.05
ROCKY BOY SCS	1.50	.80	1.70	12.40	8.20	9.10
RUDYARD 30N	.00	.55	.39	1.87	---	1.90
SIMPSON 6NW	---.	25	.49	---	1.26	2.26
SUCKER CREEK	---	.60	1.10	---	5.30	4.90
SWEETGRASS	.02	1.31	.58	3.05	4.06	2.47
TAYLOR ROAD	1.50	1.00	1.40	7.10	6.20	6.30
TURNER 11N	.35	.56	---	1.77	2.43	---
Total -- 17 stations	94.0%	127.0%		118.0%	105.0%	
(prec, in = 11.70)		(9.21)		(72.94)	(69.78)	
ST. MARY AND MILK RIVER BASINS						
Total -- 20 stations	115.0%	183.0%		116.0%	109.0%	
(prec, in = 28.30)		(15.46)		(172.11)	(158.27)	

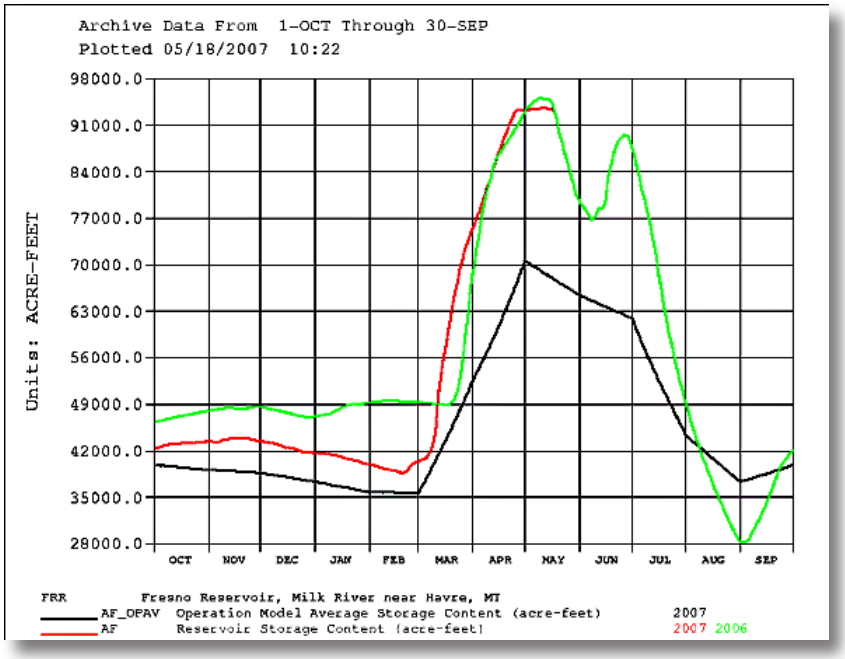


Loggerhead Shrike

Credit USFWS

water beetle

The Milk River Joint Board of Control adopted an irrigation allotment for the season of 1.75 acre-feet per acre during the board meeting on April 17. Reclamation will continue to closely monitor precipitation and streamflow conditions during the next few months before recommending an increased allotment for the Milk River Project water users.



Fresno Reservoir Storage

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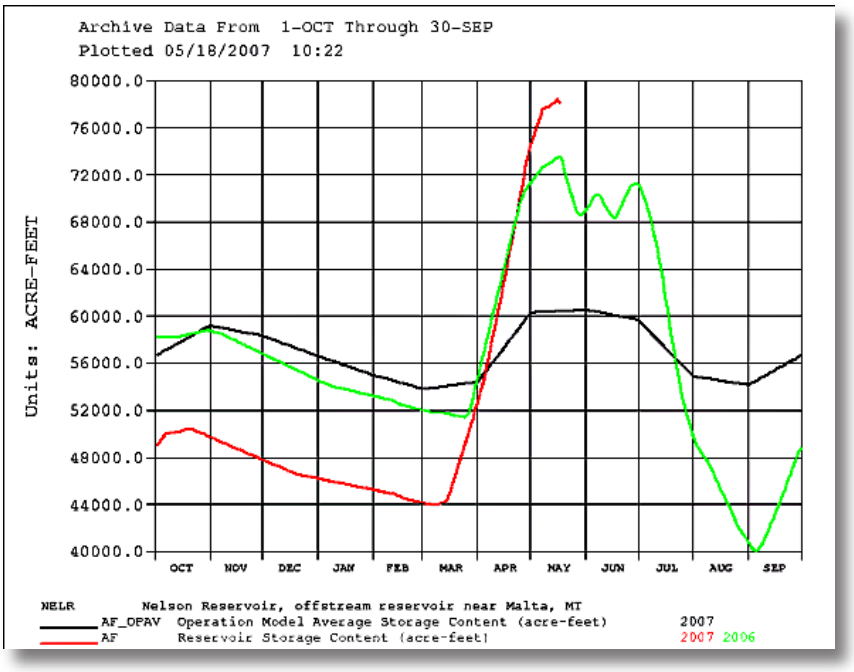

Nelson Reservoir Storage

Representatives on the Milk River JBC:

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Don Green	*Vice-Chairman*	*Malta Irr. Dist.*
Wade Jones	*Secretary*	*Malta Irr. Dist.*
Lee Cornwell	*Member*	*Glasgow Irr. Dist*
Wes Pankratz	*Member*	*Glasgow Irr. Dist.*
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